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CIA opens damage probe in wake of spy case arrests

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CIA officials are conducting a formal "damage assessment" after last week's arrests of a CIA clerk and her Ghanaian lover on espionage charges.

The assessment process, according to knowledgable sources, could take weeks or even months to complete. In the meantime, the agency has been forced to shut down most of its operations in Ghana and activities involving other countries but directed from that West African country, sources said.

"It will take years to re-establish the Ghanaian operations," said an informed intelligence source. "The damage, which is considerable, goes far beyond the information she gave. It also affects American credibility and recruitment efforts in the region. No one will want to work with Americans" in Africa, he said.

Sharon M. Scranage, a $22,000-a-year employee of the CIA, and Michael Agbotui Soussoudis, a relative of Ghana's leader, were arrested last week in Virginia. Ms. Scranage had returned to the United States, and Mr. Soussoudis was visiting her to obtain information from files at CIA headquarters, according to affidavits filed in federal court.

Both are accused of conspiracy to commit espionage and are being held without bond.

In papers filed in federal court in Alexandria, Ms. Scranage admitted that she revealed the identities of CIA agents and officials in Ghana to Mr. Soussoudis, knowing that he was delivering the information to Ghanaian officials.

She also admitted passing classified CIA cable traffic, the contents of an intelligence report on Ghanaian dissident groups, information on CIA communications equipment, and operational plans on intelligence-gathering methods at the CIA station in Accra, the capital.

CIA officials are trying to determine what was compromised, and when. "They are trying to figure out the damage to our abilities to collect [intelligence] or operate and damage to sources and methods, damage to reporting abilities and so on," said one source.

Ms. Scranage has been described as a "clerk" in the CIA station in Accra. But several sources said that as an administrative support assistant, she would have had access to a great deal of internal information.

This information, some of which she already has admitted to passing to Mr. Soussoudis, is said to include the identities of CIA officers and their informants in Ghana, names of suspected Soviet or East bloc intelligence officers and agents, and information on CIA finances and clandestine payment procedures.

It also would include CIA security procedures, locations of "safe houses," identification of automobiles, the identity of CIA officials who visited Ghana from other parts of Africa and the types of information the CIA was interested in obtaining about other foreign intelligence services — mostly the Soviets, East Germans and Libyans.

"The list could go on," said N. Scot Miler, a former CIA counterintelligence official. He added that in addition to its intelligence value, "all this information would be of value to terrorists." Mr. Miler said he was speaking in general terms and not in specific reference to the case.

Sources close to the Scranage investigation said that her activities in Ghana had begun to attract the attention of U.S. counterintelligence agents there. It was known, for example, that she had had a close relationship to Mr. Soussoudis for many months. Mr. Soussoudis has said he is a relative of Ghana's leader, Provisional National Defense Council Chairman Jerry Rawlings.

Sources told The Washington Times that "more than one" Ghanaian agent who was secretly working for the CIA has been killed as a result of the espionage leaks.

Details of Ms. Scranage's activities came to light, sources said, during a routine lie detector re-examination at CIA headquarters in Langley after she had completed her tour of duty in Ghana and was to be reassigned.

CIA employees usually take a polygraph test after completing duty tours in foreign countries.

Intelligence sources said that part of the damage assessment will determine which, if any, of the Ghanaian agents that Ms. Scranage had identified were taken into custody and "turned" into double agents. In that capacity they might have given the CIA false or misleading information.

Some exposed agents might have been allowed to continue meeting with the CIA, but forced to reveal details to Ghanaian security officials on a regular basis.

One source said that, while some Ghanaian CIA agents had been killed, most of the others would not have been physically harmed or imprisoned, as that would have tipped off the CIA that something was amiss.

Not all intelligence experts believe Ms. Scranage has seriously damaged CIA operations. Ray Cline, a former CIA deputy director now with the Georgetown Center for Strategic and International Studies, said: "Actually, all this woman had to give were informants in the country of Ghana. That's an internal security matter, and I don't think they would go around bragging about it."

Mr. Cline said he didn't think Ms. Scranage would have had access to secret security codes used for communications. "She probably gave them classified messages, but "that's not normally enough to get into the code business."

"Codes are so mechanical these days, I doubt very much that she had the kind of knowledge that would help very much, nor do I think the Ghanaians themselves could use sophisticated code information. If they actually had the codes, they could sell them to somebody — the Russians would probably buy them. But I don't think she gave them the codes," he said.

Mr. Miler said Ghanaian intelligence officials in the past have been trained by the Soviet Union and East Germany. The uncovering of CIA operations in Ghana might strengthen pro-Soviet forces and redirect that West African nation's policies in a more anti-American direction.

Defense Council Chairman Rawlings has adopted a slightly more moderate policy toward the United States recently in an apparent effort to obtain Western economic assistance. But Ghana's intelligence chief, Capt. Kojo Tsikata, reportedly heads the pro-Soviet faction of Ghana's government and is believed by some to be the Ghanaian intelligence official mentioned in court papers as involved in the Scranage operation.

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